

Cathepsin B-Specific Metabolic Precursor for In Vivo Tumor-Specific Fluorescence Imaging

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Abstract: Recently, metabolic glycoengineering with bioorthogonal click reactions has focused on improving the tumor targeting efficiency of nanoparticles as delivery vehicles for anticancer drugs or imaging agents. It is the key technique for developing tumor-specific metabolic precursors that can generate unnatural glycans on the tumor-cell surface. A cathepsin B-specific cleavable substrate (KGRR) conjugated with triacetylated *N*-azidoacetyl-D-mannosamine (RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz) was developed to enable tumor cells to generate unnatural glycans that contain azide groups. The generation of azide groups on the tumor cell surface was exogenously and specifically controlled by the amount of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz that was fed to target tumor cells. Moreover, unnatural glycans on the tumor cell surface were conjugated with near infrared fluorescence (NIRF) dye-labeled molecules by a bioorthogonal click reaction in cell cultures and in tumor-bearing mice. Therefore, our RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz is promising for research in tumor-specific imaging or drug delivery.

Metabolic glycoengineering is a useful biological technique, which utilizes the intrinsic glycan metabolism of cells to introduce unnatural glycans with various chemical groups

such as ketones, thiols, alkynes, azides, and bicyclononynes.^[1] When the cells are treated with unnatural metabolic precursors, they use them as building blocks for glycan metabolism and these precursors containing azide groups (–N₃) are exogenously generated on the cell surface.^[2] Particularly, bioorthogonal click molecules could be chemically bound to the unnatural glycans by click chemistry in living cells or organisms as well as ex vivo conditions for various biomedical applications.^[3]

Recently, we have also focused on the use of bioorthogonal click chemistry in new active-targeting strategies for tumor-targeted nanoparticles for delivering imaging agents or anticancer drugs. The active-targeting efficiency of nanoparticles is still limited and there are many obstacles to improving their tumor-targeting efficacy in vivo.^[4] Until now, nanoparticle surfaces have been extensively modified with tumor-targeted biological ligands such as antibodies, peptides, aptamers, and glucoses, which can specifically bind to the overexpressed biological receptors.^[5] However, the expression level of biological receptors on tumor cells has been reported to be usually saturated and insufficient for nanoparticle targeting.^[4] To surmount the lower tumor-targeting efficiency of the traditional active-targeting strategy, we have suggested the use of exogenous chemical receptors that can be produced on the tumor-cell surface by using metabolic glycoengineering.^[6] The intra-tumorally-injected metabolic precursors could produce the unnatural glycans containing azide groups (–N₃) on the tumor cells by metabolic glycoengineering. Subsequently, the chemical receptors of unnatural glycans could be successfully targeted using bioorthogonal click-molecule-conjugated nanoparticles in tumor-bearing mice. However, the biggest drawback of metabolic glycoengineering in tumor-targeting delivery systems is that the intravenously injected metabolic precursors do not have any specificity against the targeted tumor cells in vivo, resulting in the production of the same exogenous chemical receptors on the surface of both normal cells and tumor cells.^[7] Therefore, newly designed metabolic precursors with targeted tumor-cell specificity are urgently needed in tumor imaging and treatment.

Bertozzi's group recently introduced a prostate-tumor-cell-specific caged metabolic precursor with a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) protease-specific cleavable peptide substrate.^[8] Although PSA protease-specific metabolic precursors showed high-specificity for the targeted prostate tumor cells in the cell culture system, this approach had potential problems for use under in vivo conditions. This is because the PSA protease-specific metabolic precursors are degraded by PSA protease in the blood and then the uncaged metabolites

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may also be taken up by normal cells surrounding the tumor tissues, such as fibroblast, muscle, and endothelial cells.^[9]

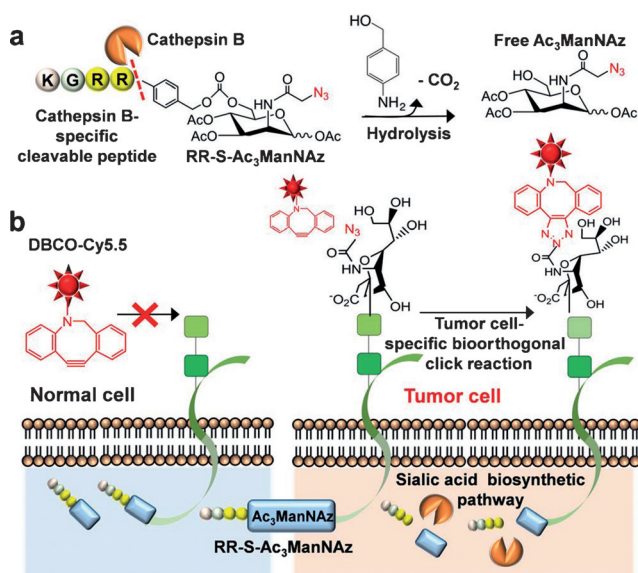
To overcome these drawbacks, we developed a cathepsin B-specific cleavable peptide-substrate caged metabolic precursors that can be specifically cleaved in the cytoplasm of the target tumor cells. This is because cathepsin B is a cysteine protease abundant in the cytoplasm of various tumor cells, such as colorectal cancer,^[10] malignant glioma,^[11] breast cancer,^[12] prostate cancer,^[13] and melanoma. Therefore, cathepsin B-specific imaging probes and pro-drugs have received much attention for the development of new therapeutic platforms for cancer therapy.^[14] The cathepsin B-specific peptide caged metabolic precursor consists of three major components, a cathepsin B-specific cleavable peptide moiety (Lys-Gly-Arg-Arg, KGRR), a spacer linker of *p*-aminobenzyloxycarbonyl (S), and the metabolic precursor of triacetylated *N*-azidoacetyl- α -mannosamine (Ac₃ManNAz), resulting in RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz (Scheme 1a). We have confirmed that the cathepsin B specifically cleavable peptide moiety of Lys-Gly-Arg-Arg (KGRR) was successfully cleaved by the targeting cathepsin B enzyme using in vitro enzyme tests and in vivo tumor-bearing mice.^[15] Importantly, after the cellular uptake of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz, the dipeptide RR of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz can be specifically cleaved by cathepsin B in the cytoplasm of cathepsin B-overexpressed tumor cells and then the degraded S-Ac₃ManNAz can be hydrolyzed to produce free Ac₃ManNAz. Finally, free Ac₃ManNAz can generate the chemical receptors on the targeted tumor cells by metabolic glycoengineering and the exogenous chemical receptors can be targeted with bioorthogonal dibenzylcyclooctyne labeled with the near-infrared fluorescent dye Cy5.5 (DBCO-Cy5.5) through click chemistry

(Scheme 1b). Therefore, we expect that the cathepsin B-specific metabolic precursor can produce the chemical receptors on the tumor cell surface in vivo and be used as a new alternative tumor-targeting technique.

To make tumor-cell-targeting metabolic precursor, cathepsin B-specific cleavable metabolite was prepared by chemical conjugation of cathepsin B-specific cleavable peptide (KGRR, a recognition site is italicized^[16]) with a self-immolative linker (S) to a metabolite (*N*-acetyl azidomannosamine triacetylated), resulting in RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz (Supporting Information, Figure S1). It was purified by reverse-phase high-performance liquid chromatography (RP-HPLC). The molecular weight of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz was monitored using electrospray ionization mass spectrometry (ESI-MS, *m/z* calculated: 1077.1, observed: 1078.1 [M+H⁺]) and matrix-assisted laser desorption/ionization analysis (MALDI, *m/z* calculated: 1077.1, observed: 1077.5 and 1078.5 [M+H⁺]) (Supporting Information, Figure S2). Furthermore, the chemical structure of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz was analyzed by ¹H NMR spectroscopy based on representative characteristic peaks at 1.78 ppm (–CH₃ at acetylated Lys), 1.85–2.0 ppm (–CH₃ at Ac₃ManNAz), and 7.34 and 7.61 ppm (–CH at the PABC linker) (Supporting Information, Figure S3).

Importantly, the degradation of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz in a cathepsin B solution was clearly observed by HPLC. 3 h post-incubation, the dipeptide RR of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz started to degrade and was continuously hydrolyzed to give free Ac₃ManNAz, indicating the rapid and successive enzyme reaction (Figure 1a). Furthermore, free Ac₃ManNAz was gradually cleaved from RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz in a time-dependent manner, indicating the specific enzyme reaction. In the absence of cathepsin B, there was no measurable release of Ac₃ManNAz from RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz in PBS for up to 12 h (Supporting Information, Figure S4). This is because the spacer is very stable when it is linked to both Ac₃ManNAz and RR peptide under physiological conditions.^[17] Furthermore, when the RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz was incubated in the presence of cathepsin D, E, L, and caspase-3, we did not observe release of Ac₃ManNAz from RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz for up to 12 h (Figure 1b). These enzyme assays of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz in the presence of cathepsin B, D, E, L, and caspase-3 clearly demonstrated the cathepsin B-specific degradation of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz.

For the tumor-cell-specific generation of chemical receptors by metabolic glycoengineering, the azide groups in the chemical receptors on the tumor-cell surface were directly visualized using DBCO-Cy5.5 in the cell culture system. This is because DBCO has a higher reactivity for the azide groups of unnatural glycans through bioorthogonal click reactions.^[18] To confirm the bioorthogonal click reaction on the tumor-cell surface, HT-29 human colon tumor cells were pre-incubated with RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz (5 μ M) or Ac₃ManNAz (5 μ M) for 24, 48, 72, 96, and 120 h, followed by treatment with DBCO-Cy5.5 (200 nM) for 2 h. Importantly, both RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz- and Ac₃ManNAz-treated HT-29 cells showed the strong NIRF signals on their surfaces, indicating that RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz was successfully cleaved to generate the similar amounts of chemical receptors on the cell surface, compared to free Ac₃ManNAz (Figure 1c). The relative NIRF inten-



Scheme 1. Schematic of cathepsin B-specific cleavage and fluorescence labeling of metabolic precursor (RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz) in the tumor cell. a) Cathepsin B-specific cleavage of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz results in the release of a linker, KGRR peptide, and Ac₃ManNAz. b) Tumor-cell-specific bioorthogonal click reaction between exogenous unnatural glycan (chemical receptor) and NIRF-dye-labeled bioorthogonal click molecules (DBCO-Cy5.5).

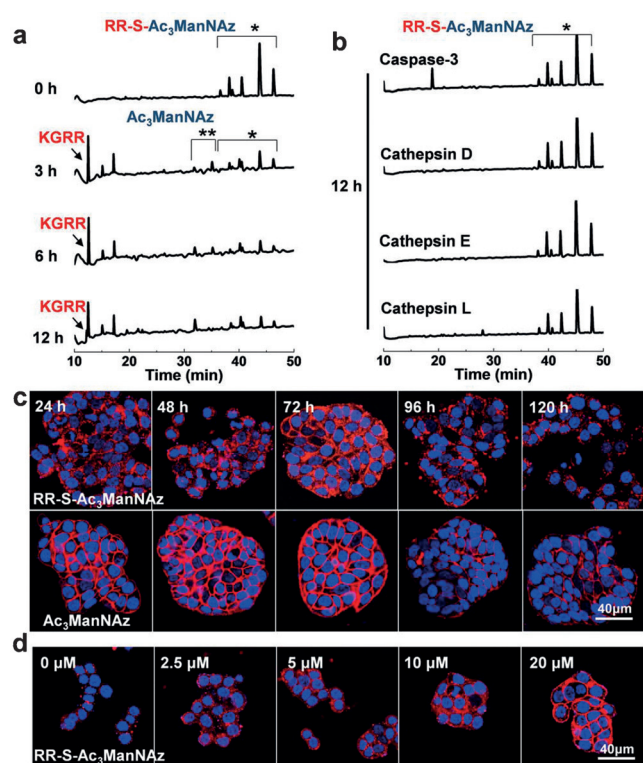


Figure 1. $Ac_3ManNAz$ is released from $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ by cathepsin B, D, E, L, and caspase-3 reaction in vitro. The in vitro release of $Ac_3ManNAz$ was monitored by HPLC at 0, 3, 6, and 12 h for cathepsin B and 12 h for caspase-3, cathepsin D, E, and L as a control experiment. The enzymatic reaction was performed with a) cathepsin B (50 $\mu g mL^{-1}$) or b) caspase-3 and cathepsin D, E, and L. * indicates $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ and ** released $Ac_3ManNAz$. c) Time-dependent confocal microscopy fluorescence imaging of azide groups on the surface of HT-29 cells in vitro. HT-29 cells were treated with $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ (5 μM) or $Ac_3ManNAz$ (5 μM), followed by DBCO-Cy5.5 (200 nm). d) Dose-dependent fluorescence imaging experiments. HT-29 cells were treated with $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ at concentrations between 0 and 25 μM . Red = DBCO-Cy5.5 channel; blue = DAPI channel.

sities of $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ - or $Ac_3ManNAz$ -treated cells at various time points were calculated by measuring the average NIRF intensity of 40 cells in the cell culture system using imaging software ($n=40$) (Supporting Information, Figure S5). The NIRF intensity of $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ -treated HT-29 cells gradually increased for up to 72 h and decreased 96 h post-incubation. However, free $Ac_3ManNAz$ -treated HT-29 cells showed that the amount of chemical receptors on the tumor cell surface gradually decreased 48 h post-incubation. It is deduced that $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ was gradually cleaved in the cytoplasm of HT-29 cells through the cathepsin B-specific cleavage reaction. Furthermore, $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ can generate chemical receptors on the tumor cell surface in a dose-dependent manner without any cytotoxicity, as shown by increasing the concentration of $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ from 0.1 μM to 20 μM in cell culture media (Figure 1 d and the Supporting Information, Figure S6a). This means that the amount of chemical receptors was exogenously controlled by delivering different amounts of $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ into the cell culture system. Based on the tumor

cell imaging, the concentration of $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ was fixed at 5 μM and the incubation time at 72 h for the expression of chemical receptors on the targeted tumor cell surfaces.

We carefully tested in vitro cathepsin B specificity of $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ as the tumor cell-specific metabolic precursor using an inhibitor of cysteine proteases (Z-FA-FMK) and cathepsin B-suppressed HT-29 cells. First, when the HT-29 cells were pretreated with Z-FA-FMK (50 $\mu g mL^{-1}$) for 24 h, $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ -treated tumor cells did not present a strong NIRF signal 2 h post-treatment of DBCO-Cy5.5, compared with tumor cells treated with only $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$. This is because Z-FA-FMK is a very potent irreversible inhibitor of cysteine proteases, including cathepsin B, L, and S, cruzain, and papain.^[19] However, free $Ac_3ManNAz$ -treated tumor cells showed a slightly decreased NIRF intensity of DBCO-Cy5.5 in the presence of Z-FA-FMK (Figure 2a). From this enzyme inhibitor assay, the higher tumor-cell specificity of $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ against the irreversible inhibitor of cysteine proteases was clearly observed. Flow cytometry measurements showed that the mean fluorescence intensities (MFIs) of $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ -treated HT-29 cells were 10-fold higher than those of Z-FA-FMK-treated tumor cells, whereas the NIRF intensities of the $Ac_3ManNAz$ treated groups slightly decreased in the presence of Z-FA-FMK (Figure 2b). This is because Z-FA-FMK had a negative effect on the proliferation of HT-29 cells in the cell culture system (Supporting Information, Figure S6b,c).^[20] Successful generation of chemical receptors on the surface of HT-29 cells was further analyzed by western blot analysis, in which azide-containing glycoproteins in lysates of HT-29 cells were labeled with phosphine-PEG₃-biotin for 6 h and then separated by molecular weight by 10% SDS-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis. The separated glycoproteins were transferred onto PVDF membranes, followed by detection with streptavidin-HRP. Compared with non-treated tumor cells, $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ - and $Ac_3ManNAz$ -treated tumor cells showed strong band intensities of azide-containing sialic acids in the western blot analysis, whereas the azide-containing sialic acids of Z-FA-FMK-treated tumor cells were greatly suppressed, as much as non-treated tumor cells (Figure 2c). However, the inhibition assay of Z-FA-FMK is not specifically restricted to the targeted cathepsin B in the cell culture system, we further confirmed the cathepsin B-specificity of $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ using cathepsin B-suppressed HT-29 tumor cells.^[20] Cathepsin B-suppressed HT-29 cells were prepared by treatment with siRNA complexes consisting of cathepsin B-specific siRNA and lipofectamine 2000. Suppression of cathepsin B in the HT-29 cells was confirmed using western blot analysis (Supporting Information, Figure S8a), which showed that the azide-containing sialic acids of cathepsin B-suppressed tumor cells were suppressed as much as in non-treated tumor cells (Figure 2c). Importantly, when cathepsin B-suppressed tumor cells were treated with $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$, they did not present a strong NIRF signal 2 h post-treatment of DBCO-Cy5.5, compared with only $RR-S-Ac_3ManNAz$ -treated wild type tumor cells. However, free $Ac_3ManNAz$ -treated cathepsin B-suppressed tumor cells presented a similar NIRF intensity of DBCO-Cy5.5 to those

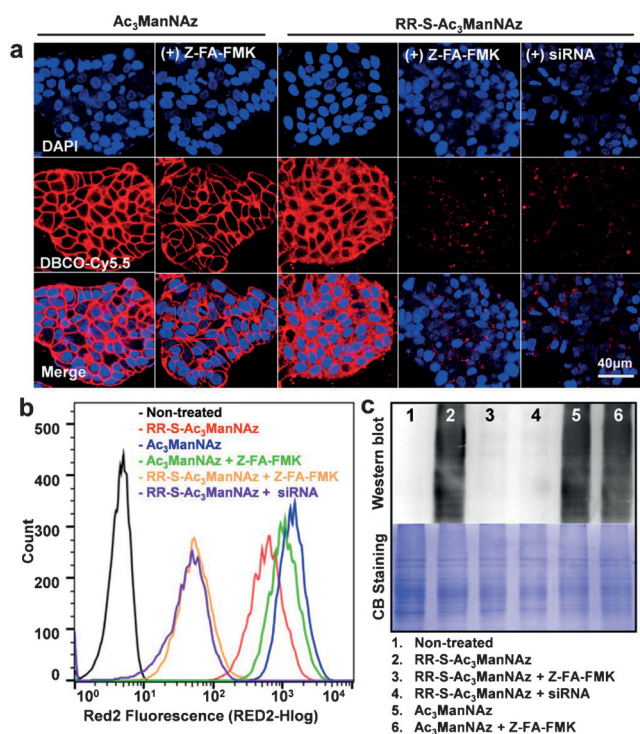


Figure 2. Cathepsin B-specific incorporation of azide as a chemical receptor on wild type HT-29 and cathepsin B-suppressed HT-29 cells. a) Confocal microscopy images of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz- and Ac₃ManNAz-treated wild type HT-29 and cathepsin B-suppressed HT-29 cells. Azide groups were labeled with DBCO-Cy5.5 for visualization. The HT-29 cells were treated with 50 μg mL⁻¹ of Z-FA-FMK for 24 h before treatment with RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz and Ac₃ManNAz for the inhibition of cathepsin B enzyme activity. The HT-29 cells were treated with 100 nm of Lipo-siRNA(cathepsin B) for 4 h before treatment with RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz and Ac₃ManNAz for suppression of cathepsin B. b) The fluorescence signal was quantified using flow cytometry. c) Western blot analysis of azide groups in glycoproteins in vitro. The coomassie stain shows the total amount of protein.

treated wild type tumor cells (Supporting Information, Figure S9a). From the flow cytometry measurements, the MFIs of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz-treated wild type HT-29 cells were 57-fold higher than those of cathepsin B-suppressed tumor cells, whereas the NIRF intensities of the Ac₃ManNAz-treated groups showed negligible changes of MFIs in both wild type and cathepsin B-suppressed tumor cells (Supporting Information, Figure S9b). This strongly suggests that the cathepsin B-specific RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz must be cleaved by the cathepsin B enzyme that is overexpressed in tumor cells.

The higher specificity of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz for the cathepsin B enzyme was also tested in different normal and cancer cell lines, such as human dermal fibroblast (HDF), Rat BDIX heart myoblast (H9C2), human umbilical vein endothelial cells (HUVEC), human colon adenocarcinoma (HT-29), human prostate adenocarcinoma (PC-3), human brain glioblastoma (U87 MG), and human breast adenocarcinoma (MDA-MB231) (Figure 3a). First, the cathepsin B expression level of normal cells (HDF, H9C2, and HUVEC) was significantly lower than that of different tumor cells (HT-29, PC-3, U87 MG, and MDA-MB231), which was confirmed

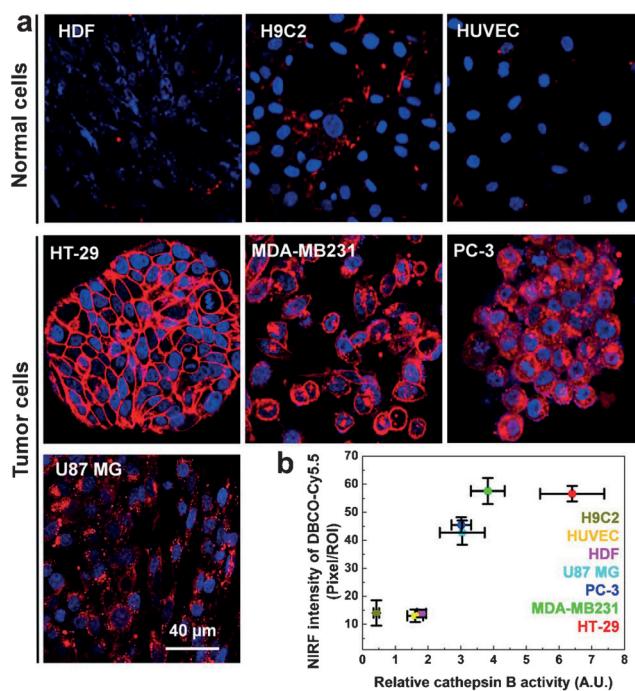


Figure 3. Cathepsin B-specific incorporation of azide groups on HT-29, MDA-MB231, PC-3, and U87 MG tumor cells, compared with normal HDF, H9C2, and HUVEC cells. a) Confocal microscopy images of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz-treated HT-29, MDA-MB231, PC-3, U87 MG, HDF, H9C2, and HUVEC cells. Azide groups were labeled with DBCO-Cy5.5 for visualization. Red = DBCO-Cy5.5 channel; blue = DAPI channel. b) Quantification of NIRF intensity of confocal microscopy images using ImageJ software and cathepsin B activities from cathepsin B activity assay.

using western blot analysis (Supporting Information, Figure S8b,c). Relative band intensity showed that the cathepsin B expression level of tumor cells was 2–200-fold higher than those of normal cells (Supporting Information, Figure S8b). Furthermore, the real degradation of enzyme activity of cathepsin B in normal and tumor cells was carefully quantified using a cathepsin B fluorescence kit. The enzyme activity of cathepsin B in tumor cells is much higher than that of normal cells. In particular, HT-29 cells showed the maximum enzyme intensity of cathepsin B in the cell culture system, compared to that of normal and other cancer cells (Figure 3b). In the cell imaging data, the NIRF intensity of Ac₃ManNAz-treated normal cells and tumor cells presented a similar strong fluorescent intensity after DBCO-Cy5.5 labeling (Supporting Information, Figure S7b). However, RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz-treated normal cells presented the lowest NIRF intensity, owing to the lower level of expressed cathepsin B. Importantly, tumor cells showed strong NIRF intensities that are closely related to the enzyme activity of cathepsin B in tumor cells, which was measured using a cathepsin B fluorescence kit. From these imaging data, the generation of chemical receptors by RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz is strongly correlated with the expression level of cathepsin B in targeted tumor cells. Therefore, we suggest that RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz could generate the chemical receptors by the cathepsin B-specific cleavage mechanism in the cell culture

system, and the exogenously generated chemical receptors could be specifically visualized by labeling with DBCO-Cy5.5 through a bioorthogonal click reaction.

Encouraged by the *in vitro* tumor cell imaging data, we evaluated the *in vivo* generation of cathepsin B-specific chemical receptors on the targeted tumor cells by direct tumoral injection of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz. 1×10^7 HT-29 cells were directly inoculated into both left and right flanks of nude mice ($n = 4$). When the tumors grew, RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz was directly injected into the tumor tissue, once a day for four days. As a control experiment, Z-FA-FMK was directly injected into the left tumors four times before injection of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz for one day. The Z-FA-FMK-treated tumors did not present any side effect on the tumor growth seven days post-injection (Supporting Information, Figure S10a).

One day post-injection of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz, DBCO-Cy5.5 (4 mg kg^{-1}) was intravenously injected to image the chemical receptors in tumor tissues by *in vivo* bioorthogonal click chemistry. Interestingly, RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz-treated tumor tissues presented the strongest NIRF intensity in right tumors that were pre-treated with only RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz, whereas Z-FA-FMK-treated left tumors showed a minimum NIRF intensity (Figure 4a). This indicates that RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz successfully generated the chemical receptors on the tumor cell surface *in vivo* through cathepsin B-specific metabolic glycoengineering. Moreover, *ex vivo* NIRF images showed that the NIRF intensity of DBCO-Cy5.5 in right tumor tissue was much higher than that of Z-FA-FMK-treated left tumors (Figure 4b). The total NIRF intensity of DBCO-Cy5.5 in the right tumor tissue was 3-fold higher than the left tumor tissue (Figure 4c). The strong NIRF signals of DBCO-Cy5.5 (red) in right tumor tissues were also observed using fluorescence microscopy after immunofluorescence (IF) staining, in which the overexpressed cathepsin B (green) was also clearly observed in both tumor tissues using a FITC-labeled *anti*-cathepsin B antibody (Figure 4d). Western blot analysis clearly showed that the strong azide-containing sialic acid bands were only observed on the RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz-treated right tumors, compared with Z-FA-FMK-treated left tumors (Figure 4e). Finally, we tested our precursor by intravenous injection. When the HT-29 tumor grew, RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz was intravenously injected into tumor-bearing mice, once a day for three days. As control, saline was also intravenously injected into the same tumor models once a day for three days. One day post-injection of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz, DBCO-Cy5.5 was also intravenously injected into tumor-bearing mice and whole body images were observed one day post-injection. Importantly, the RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz-treated mice presented the higher NIRF signal in the tumor tissues, compared to the saline-treated mice (Supporting Information, Figure S11a). From this, it is deduced that the intravenously injected RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz also can successfully generate chemical receptors on the tumor cell surface *in vivo*. Moreover, the dissected RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz-treated tumors clearly showed the higher NIRF intensity, compared with the saline-treated tumors (Supporting Information, Figure S11b), as seen in the NIRF average photon counts per gram from excised tumors, which

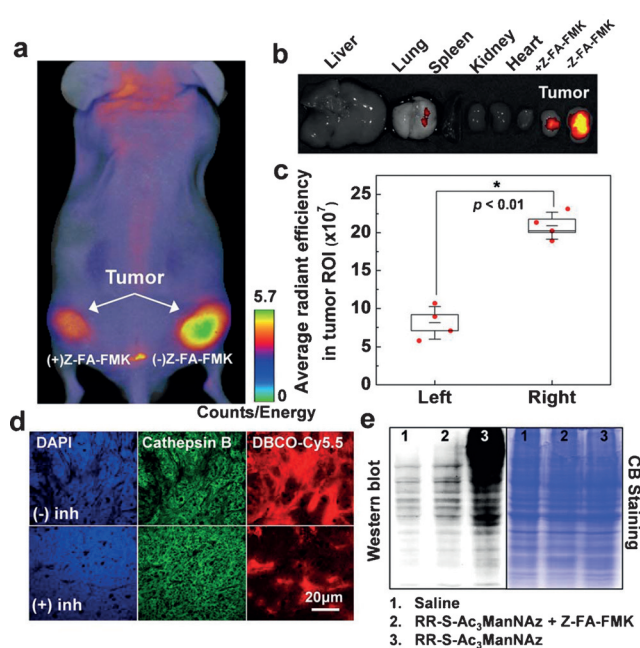


Figure 4. Cathepsin B-specific incorporation of azide groups and labeling of azide groups in HT-29 tumor-bearing mice model ($n = 4$) by direct tumoral injection of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz. For azide incorporation in tumor tissue, 4 mg kg^{-1} of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz was directly injected into left (Z-FA-FMK (+)) and right (Z-FA-FMK (-)) tumor tissues four times. a) Fluorescence images of azide groups in tumor tissues labeled with DBCO-Cy5.5. b) *Ex vivo* fluorescence images of major organs and tumors 24 h post-injection of DBCO-Cy5.5. c) Average radiant efficiency in tumor tissues ($n = 4$) was quantified using IVIS Spectrum imaging system (PerkinElmer, USA). * indicates difference at the $p < 0.01$ significance level. d) Fluorescence images of tumor tissues from (b). Cathepsin B in tumor tissue was visualized by immunofluorescence stain. Red = DBCO-Cy5.5 channel; green = cathepsin B channel. e) Western blot analysis of azide-containing sialic acid *in vivo*. The coomassie stain shows the total amount of protein.

were 1.7–2-fold higher than that of control saline-treated tumors (Figure S11c).

In conclusion, we have developed a cathepsin B-specific metabolic precursor, RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz, for generating exogenous chemical receptors on the surface of tumor cells. Azide-containing exogenous chemical receptors were successfully generated on HT-29 tumor cells *in vitro*. Importantly, chemical receptors were also generated in tumor tissues using direct tumoral and intravenously injection of RR-S-Ac₃ManNAz. Subsequently, we can target these chemical receptors using DBCO-Cy5.5 through a bioorthogonal click reaction *in vivo*. Therefore, our cathepsin B-specific metabolic precursor with bioorthogonal click reaction may be promising for further research in tumor-specific active targeting imaging or drug delivery.

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